THREE MUSLIM QUEENS
of INDIA

NAZ

THREE FAMOUS QUEENS OF INDIA

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RAZIA SULTANA

The first woman ever known to have ruled an Empire in India and become Empress was a Muslim lady. Her original name was Raziat or Raziat-ud-din but she is commonly known today as Razia Sultana. She was the daughter of Iltamash—a slave Sultan, brother-in-law of the first settled Muslim ruler of India known as Qutb-ud-din Aibak.

India was conquered by Muslim invaders—first by Muhammad-bin-Qasim, an eighteen year old Arab General, who conquered the whole of Sind and parts of the Punjab while he had only come to teach a lesson to a haughty Hindu Raja of Sind

whose pirates had molested the women of peaceful Arab pilgrims and traders, then, two hundred years later, by an obscure Muslim chieftain from the small principality of Ghauri tucked away in the mountains of Herat in Afghanistan. India in those days was ruled by diverse Rajas, mostly Rajputs famous in history for their strength and valour, but however strong these Rajput rulers, they were not a united lot and did not have any faith strong enough to keep together to face any common danger. Earlier in their history even when India was ruled by mighty kings, the same thing had happened, they were easily conquered by the invading hosts of Greeks under Alexander the Great and were unable to offer much resistance to the angry excursions of Mahmud Ghaznavi, the Idol-Breaker,

who had taken a vow to annihilate idolatory from this land. Hence although once they did succeed in warding off the conquering designs of Muhammad Ghauri, they eventually surrendered before the smaller but well-united and disciplined forces of these Muslims from the north. The Indian caste system dividing man from man prevented them from putting up a united front.

Muhammad Ghauri was assisted in his conquests by a Turkish slave who was a General commanding his forces. His name was Qutb-ud-din Aibak.

Muhammad Ghauri secured for himself the Sind and Punjab that made up the "Great Indus Basin Civilization" now comprising the best part of West Pakistan. Already it was in the hands of a Muslim

prince, Khusro Malik from the line of Subuktagin and Mahmud Ghaznavi.

He now planned to venture forward and also gain for himself the rich and fertile fields of the Ganges Basin, teeming with idolators who were known to build golden shrines and temples to house these idols. Muslim saints had already preceded him to these parts to convert these Hindus to Islam and to undo idolatory. With the taste of seventeen terrible raids by Mahmud Ghaznavi still fresh in their minds, the Hindu Rajput Rajas for once got together in a big way and foiled Muhammad Ghauri's first attack at Terrain near Thanesar in the Karnal District. The leading Hindu Raja Prithviraj Chauhan then ruled over Ajmer and Delhi.

Muhammad Ghauri made a second attack sometimes later and defeated Prithviraj along with all those rajas that had collected to meet the invader. Ten thousand mounted archers were enough to play havoc and create confusion among the numberless forces of the rajputs who came to the battle-fields mounted on heavy moving elephants. The brave and romantic rajput ruler Prithviraj who had carried away a beautiful princess—the daughter of his rival—the king of Kanauj, unfortunately never lived happily ever after as most princes do in such tales. His happiness was marred and the myth of his valour exploded by the second invasion of Muhammad Ghauri.

Having conquered the north and new Delhi, Muhammad Ghauri thus

opened wide the gates of India for further conquest by his General Qutb-ud-din Aibak, himself he returned to Khurasan.

Qutb-ud-din Aibak occupied Delhi and advanced into the Doab. Here he was once again joined by Muhammad Ghauri to defeat Jai Chand, the ruler of Kanauj. City after city including Ajmer (the new home of Khwaja Mueenuddin Chishti, the great Muslim saint) fell like nine-pins before the Muslim might, as also fell the provinces of Bihar, Bengal and Bundhelkhand. Wherever Qutb-ud-din Aibak went he converted all fortresses, temples and shrines into mosques, making to resound everywhere the Muazzin's call to prayer. A great dream of the Muslims had at last been fulfilled.

Unfortunately Muhammad Ghauri was killed the same year in 1206 (A.H. 602) by an Ismaili at Dhamiak, a camping ground in the District of Jhelum while he was on his way to Ghazni.

Qutb-ud-din Aibak, the Turkish slave General, was proclaimed Sultan on the wishes of his Indian subjects—Hindus and Muslims alike, and his enthronement took place in Lahore. It is here that he started to make suitable marriage alliances. Himself he married the daughter of his Muslim Governor of Sind and gave his own daughter to Iltamash—the foremost of his slaves. Qutb-ud-din soon died having ruled for four years leaving his dynasty to be continued by other kings of slave origin like Iltamash Razia Sultana was thus the daughter of a slave king who raised the prestige

of Muslim women to such heights of ability as to make them fit to be ruling queens.

Razia was the eldest of Shamsud-din Iltamash's twelve children and his only daughter. She was named Raziat-ud-din meaning one who is accepted by faith. Strangely enough, of all the children of Iltamash she was the most learned, wise, brave, courageous and responsible and instilled such faith in her father by virtue of her capabilities that he named her as his successor.

They say once when as a little girl she happened to be reciting the Holy Quran sitting at her attic, her manner was so devout and her voice so melodious that a passing saint began to enquire of the people as to who she was. When informed that

she was a princess he began to marvel and say :

"'A princess and so devout! It appears this girl has some extraordinary qualities and some day she is sure to turn into a great woman."

Iltamash also observed many great qualities in his beloved daughter. Whenever consulted, she gave such sound advice that her father was astonished. None of his other children or sons showed any such sign of promise. He was often heard to be saying : "'My one daughter is equal to all my eleven sons". The truth was that Iltamash's sons were all worthless. Having grown up in a large family of boys, Razia, basking confidant in the sunshine of her father's love, learnt early to compete with her brothers and to excel them

all in learning and wisdom. Like the boys she also learnt how to ride, swim, fight, to wield the bow and arrow, the spear and the sword and all the skills taught from childhood to princes. This she would display to perfection to the great surprise of her father and noblemen.

Often when Iltamash would have to go out of his kingdom, he would leave Razia to officiate on his behalf in his absence. Thus Razia also learnt to manage state affairs. Once at one such occasion when the father returned and found that Razia had managed very well, in a fit of pride and joy he proclaimed amidst all his noblemen and courtiers : "I have decided to make Razia my successor."

But this enthusiastic proclamation fell on drawn faces. The Turks had never heard of any Muslim woman

ascending a throne. It had happened during the pre-islamic days. There was, for instance, the Queen of Sheba mentioned in the Holy Quran and some other like her referred to as the "Queen of Arabi" in the ancient scripture. But not so since a long time now and at least never heard of in the history of their own land in Turkistan. In the service of Iltamash there were also some Hindu ministers and advisers; they were mostly pundits belonging to the Brahman class and well-versed in the Vedic scriptures, and nowhere in their religion or history either was there ever any evidence of a woman ruling an Empire while there were men to do so. At last they ventured to say to the king: "But sire, when you have eleven sons where is the point in appointing your daughter as a ruler?"

"'She is the most worthy and fit to rule of all my children and I do not see any reason why she should not,'' answered the king defensively.

Iltamash's ministers thought that the king was making a foolish and outlandish decision but they did not have the courage to tell the king so on his face. Iltamash had kept in his service some forty stalwart Turks—remnants from Qutb-ud-din Aibak's days who served as personal bodyguards, ministers and advisers and had been given full military training by Qutb-ud-din Aibak so that they could also command the forces of the slave dynasty when and wherever required. It was with the help of these forty slaves that Iltamash was able to succeed to the throne and hence their advice and

opinions were valuable and could not be easily disregarded.

Apart from these men, Iltamash's wife—the queen Turkan Shah, was also of the opinion that her eldest son Rukanuddin, who was the natural heir—apparent, should succeed his father. At last Iltamash had to give in and proceeded to give his eldest son the training necessary to become a ruler. After that he appointed him as a Governor of Lahore hoping thereby that with his influence he would be able to gain as many fresh recruits from amongst the hardy and strong sons of this fair soil to add to his large forces.

And so when the time arrived for Iltamash to depart from this world, the ministers rushed Rukanuddin to his bed-side to take over the reins of the Government.

There in the year 1236 Rukanuddin was proclaimed king. After a scandalous reign for a few months in which he proved nothing but his debauchery and displayed none of those finer qualities of which his father was possessed, Rukanuddin was cast aside by the ministers.

The truth was that Rukanuddin's mother was once only an ordinary slave girl who, by resorting to intrigue, had married Iltamash. She was, however, very ambitious. She wanted to have the control of the Empire in her own hands. No sooner had Rukanuddin ascended the throne, than she took over, taking upon herself to make major decisions and going so far as having many of Iltamash's other wives beheaded and many slave girls (of whom she was jealous) dismissed from the palace. This was certainly

a very bad beginning. Rukanuddin was in any case being ruled by a woman—his mother. Some of the ministers thought if they had to be dictated by a woman, it might as well be Razia who at least had received some training in statecraft.

But this was the view of only a faction of the ministers, those who had earlier opposed Razia's nomination were now in a guandary. Rukanuddin had given a very bad account of himself as Emperor. The people had risen in revolt, even his younger brothers, one Ghiasuddin Muhammad, who was the governor of Oudh, refused to send him the revenue for fear it would be misappropriated. The Chief Minister had resigned and joined the rebels. In short, it was only when none approved of Rukanuddin that he was dethroned. He made

one desperate attempt to fight his opponents but in vain for he was soon subdued and taken prisoner.

Now the question arose whether Razia should be installed as Empress or one of the younger brothers as Emperor. It appeared there was hardly any choice left, for the younger brothers were just as worthless and even their father had not approved of any of them. What was more, having made a wrong choice once against the greater wisdom of the late Sultan, could they afford to take another risk? However the conflict between the ministers soon resolved in favour of Razia and amidst great pomp and show she was inaugurated Empress of India.

Razia ascended the throne of Delhi as Empress. She was conscious and aware of the fact that this was

both a strange and rare position though unwillingly granted her. From now on the eyes of the whole Empire would be upon her; her ministers already squabbling among themselves over her succession, would raise in her path all manner of obtacles. They had to be not just appeased and satisfied but dealt with firmly and made to see that from now on she was the one to reign supreme. The only factor so far against her was her sex, she decided from the onset that she would not allow that to stand in her way and would appear and act as well as any male sovereign.

It was essential for her as a sovereign to be wise in judgment, beneficent, a patron of art and learning, a cherisher of her subjects, and develop in her person all the great

attributes necessary for great kings—the greatest of all the qualities would be her war-like talents. She would have to prove herself as good a warrior as any other king. She hailed from the dynasty of born warriors, her ancestors were the first real conquerors of Hindustan, in fact its first real rulers too. Qutb-ud-din Aibak had ruled as Viceroy for seventeen years before he became Sultan and although he was a Sultan only for a short period of four years, he had accomplished much. Therefore, if she had to perpetuate her memory in recorded history she must build up her image as a ruler of both administrative and military prowess. To deal in time with a natural enemy and to declare war when inevitable and even to die fighting on the battle-field if needs be, all these

were the essential qualities of a good ruler.

Razia could not prove the fact that she was as good as any man, if she were to rule from behind the veil. She could not prove that she could fight as well as any other warrior king without actually taking an active part in war, hence she decided to discard purdah and come out in the open sight of her noblemen and let her people know that she was not just a piece of ornament for the decoration of the palace, and would not make her wars into just a grand pageant for her soldiers and her subjects to see. To prove herself equal to the role assigned her she decided to dress herself in the convenient attire of a male.

Soon it was hard to tell if there was a Sultana or a Sultan seated on

the throne. She dealt swiftly with Turkhan Shah sending her into exile for her misdemeanours but with her brother she dealt less harshly, keeping him only under close house arrest.

Unlike Rukanuddin who had for so long used his office as Emperor for the fulfilment of his base passions such as drinking and making merry with women, Razia set about to restore more respect for Islam. She re-introduced the cultivation of Islamic values and insisted that Muslims live in accordance with the Holy law revealed to their Prophet.

But the Muslims at the helm of affairs at the court were themselves doubtful whether it was Islamic to allow a woman to rule. The party that was opposing her formerly now formed a separate front and joining

hands with Rukanuddin's Chief Minister the Nizam-ul-Mulk, now began to instigate the Governors of different provinces against her. The Hindus revelled over this struggle and added spice to the endless controversy. However one such Governor called Malik Nasiruddin stood strongly by her. He thought it was unfair to remove Razia from the throne when she was performing the task of a Sultan so well, the state affairs were running smoothly enough, and to bring about a change was quite unnecessary. When Razia heard of Malik Nasiruddin's loyalty towards her, conferring upon him a title she wrote and said : "It is not enough that you support one verbally, you should give more active support, meaning that he should be willing to take up his sword against her enemies.

Nasiruddin was much touched by her request and immediately sending the gallant reply: "At your majesty's service", he mustered his forces and set out for the capital of Delhi. Unfortunately he was intercepted on the way by the superior number of the rebels and killed.

Razia realized that the rebels by now had gained much strength and would not tolerate her open supporters. However she was not intimidated nor dettered from her purpose of dealing with them firmly. Only now she would resort to a different stratagem. She decided to cause divisions in their ranks and split up their common front. Once that was done, she dealt with each one of them independently, declaring war on them, with each in their separate pockets and taking them as prisoners

or putting them to death. Out of these rebels one was her own brother, her army spared him thinking Razia would not like him to be punished like the rest but Razia ordered that he should be instantly put to death, for whereas Rukanuddin was fighting for a legitimate cause her other brother was guilty of plain treason.

Yet another strong rebel was Alauddin Sherjani who had managed to escape from the battle-field. Razia ordered his immediate arrest. He had fled from country to country but was at last caught at Babylon where he was put instantly to death. Then there was the Chief Minister of her brother Rukanuddin Muhammad Junaidi—the Nizam-ul-Mulk, who, too, had fled to some distant parts but was hounded, captured and put to death. This stern

treatment made it clear that Razia would stand no nonsense. She had herself fought the battles against these rebels, mounted on a horse, dressed in the male attire of a warrior and had emerged victorious.

Soon a very important problem was settled, her enemies had been defeated and killed and she could now replace the rebel Ministers with others of her choice. In place of the Nizam-ul-Mulk she put Khwaja Mozhib-ud-Din and appointed one called Saif-ud-Din Aibak as the Commander-in-Chief of her forces. Many of the rebels sought pardon and were now granted a general amnesty. One such noble man was Azza-ud-Din who was appointed Governor of Lahore, another trustee and relation of her father called Balban (and who later became Emperor) was

appointed "Lord of the Chase". As bad luck would have it Saif-ud-Din Aibak died shortly after having taken command of his army. Razia had to appoint a new man in his place. She chose Qutb-ud-din a relatively less experienced man but he had been in the service of Qutb-ud-din Aibak in the earlier conquest of India and he knew well the different parts of the country.

Razia wanted to prepare an attack against the famous fortress of Rathambore in which certain Muslims had been held captive since the reign of her brother Rukanuddin. This fortress belonged to the Hindus and was so strong that the Hindus had woven a legend that it had been constructed by some super-natural agents and their gods had been so well pleased

with it that they pronounced it impregnable and inviolable.

Former Muslim invaders had already exploded this myth by having conquered it. It was, however, once again lost during the time of Rukan-uddin when many Muslim soldiers were taken prisoners and held captive there. For Razia it was now a matter of Muslim prestige and it was absolutely essential that these prisoners be released. All this was not possible without declaring war on these Hindus of Rathambore. Qutb-ud-din proved a very successful General, for in no time he conquered this famous fortress, released the Muslim prisoners and restored it to the Muslims.

We have already told you how Razia sent Azza-uddin as Governor of Lahore. This was an old historic

city of the Punjab famous for its culture and soldiery. This province blessed with five rivers has always been very fertile, the people of this soil are strong and hardy. During peace time they serve as tillers and during war they are a fine human material for recruitment in the army. The Governor of Lahore Azza-uddin began to exploit this position. As Governor he was authorised to equip himself with a strong force. This he did, but not for the benefit of the Empress but to strengthen his own hands. He had by this time become convinced in his mind that the Amirs and noblemen would not allow a woman to rule over them for long.

In short, he was preparing to undo Razia and become the Emperor of Hindustan himself. Thus when

fully equipped with a strong force, he declared war on Razia and marched onto Delhi. Razia as Empress had not been inactive all this while, she too had acquired for herself a large force which now in a matter of a few more days she raised upto yet a greater number, much to the surprise of her people. The moment Azza-ud-Din heard the news of her frantic preparations for war, he began to get cold feet and soon began to send her letters of apology begging to be forgiven. Razia decided to over-look this overture; she thought he had had enough of a lesson. He would now never underrate the capabilities of a woman. When Azza-ud-Din begged for forgiveness again and again she was pleased enough to bestow on him the Governorship of Multan as well.

From Bhatinda came yet another rebellion. The Governor of this place was called Altunyia. He had been defeated twice before but never gave up the belief that Razia being a woman could manage to hold on against the superiority of the opposite sex. Sooner or later she would have to vacate the throne. Since all the Governors and noblemen were simply waiting for an excuse, when Razia raised the position of a certain slave bodyguard called Jamal uddin Yaqoot, Altunyia as well as others got the necessary excuse to scandalize Razia, not realizing that her Turkish slave ancestors had themselves arisen from exactly the same position, that in Islam the highest post was open to merit without consideration of caste or colour. It is easy to understand why Razia felt it necessary to have

a strong and trustworthy personal bodyguard. Not only because previous rulers had done precisely the same but because the threat to her life was greater. Whatever her considerations for giving Yaqoot rapid promotions in her service and raising him to the status of a nobleman and Amir, the Governor Altunyia took it as a personal affront, that while there existed such real born noblemen like himself, the Empress should choose a common slave to bestow her favours on. Hence he rose in open revolt. Razia, in order to stem this rising, marched on Bhatinda but alas! the commanders of her forces betrayed her and began to side with Altunyia. While yet on the way to Bhatinda, they rose up in arms against Razia and her alleged paramour. Having killed Yaqoot, they took Razia

prisoner and personally handed her over to Altunyia.

At this the officers at court in Delhi after due consultation with each other placed Razia's younger brother Muaz-uddin Bairam Shah on the throne.

Razia had little option but to marry Altunyia and joining hands with him she raised a strong force of Jat peasantry and marched on to Delhi to recapture the throne.

Meanwhile the old fox Azzaud-din, jealous of Altunyia's rising power and having gained the hand of the Empress, sided with Bairam Shah and gave Razia and her groom a crushing defeat. Razia who was on the battle-field alongside her husband, managed to escape to Bhatinda and arrange for re-inforcements. Once again a severe

fight took place on the plain of Kaithal and once again Razia was defeated. Both Altunyia and Razia made good their escape but while fleeing through the fields and famished by hunger she asked a peasant for something to eat. He offered her half his loaf of bread taking her for a beggar, for she was so attired for escape. After this humble meal and a few sips of water (the first she had had since the whole day), Razia thanked God and began to stretch herself on the ground to sleep. Within a few moments she was so lost to the world that her slip began to show. The peasant had so far taken her for a man, now as he lay beside her, he noticed that under the garb of a beggar his companion wore the richest apparel his eyes had ever set on. It was wrought with the most precious gems and jewels.

Among the jewellery on her person was also a diamond ring. The peasant's eyes were fixed hungrily on Razia. She was so sound asleep after the exhaustion of the battle that she did not know what evil designs were directed towards her. The peasant stabbed Razia and killed her. For long her body lay in the fields undiscovered.

At last when the peasant went out to the bazaar to sell the diamond ring, the suspicions of the police were aroused, for it was well-nigh impossible for a mere peasant to come by a gem so rare.

Razia's dead body was recovered from the fields and she was given burial befitting her position at the site of the Qutb Shah in Delhi. She ruled for no more than three years—from 1236 to 1240. A great author

and historian of the times Ibnebatuta says: "Razia was a great sovereign, and sagacious, just, and beneficent, patron of the learned, a dispenser of justice, the cherisher of her subjects and of war-like talent and was endowed with all the admirable attributes and qualifications necessary for kings; but as she did not attain the destiny in her creation of being computed among men, of what advantage were all the qualifications unto her?"

We can say no more than this that for a woman of a thousand years ago, Razia's was a unique specimen in Indian History. She took on the challenge of handling an Empire will the efficiency of a man. She abandoned the veil at a time when no other woman belonging to the nobility and being accustomed to the

Zenana, could possibly have done so. Apart from fighting wars of succession with ability, Razia was called upon to suppress yet another serious revolt. It occurred between the Shias and the Sunnis. The latter had entered India during the days of the Arab conquest. Mahmud of Ghaznavi had attempted to destroy Shia power in Multan but had failed. When they revolted again during the time of Razia she stemmed them so firmly that it was difficult for a long time for them to gain ascendancy in India. All this proves that she was a stern ruler, undaunted and fearless in the face of all manner of crises.

Otherwise tolerant with the Hindus who were allowed to be governed by the laws of their own religious system, they were dealt with the same harshness as any other

Muslim when rebellious. This shows her impartiality in State affairs. The Sultans of this period like her father Iltamash and before him Qutb-ud-din Aibak, were known for their patronage of art and learning. Delhi was vested with almost one thousand such centres during the times of subsequent Muslim rulers. According to the account of Ibne-Batuta, Razia did not neglect this important aspect of her rule and was true to every quality attributed to her by this traveller and historian. She was indeed a great sovereign whose reign was interrupted by her untimely death. She was the first known woman—ruler in the history of India and has amply demonstrated the fact that given the opportunity women can prove equal to any task assigned them.

NOOR JAHAN

Noor Jahan, the wife of Jahangir, the fourth of the Great Mughal Emperors, is one of the most famous and colourful characters of Indian-Muslim history. She came some three hundred years after Razia Sultana, not by virtue of royal descent or succession but by the will of a loving and devoted Emperor who, during his last ailing years, placed the controls of the Imperial House in the hands of his able queen.

Noor Jahan was the daughter of Mirza Ghias Beg, a Persian refugee, who, during the reign of Akbar the Great—the father of Jahangir, had set out from his land to try his for-

tune in the court of the Great Mughals of India who were renowned all the world over for their patronage and munificence. During the arduous journey, a girl was born to the wife of Ghias Beg and they were faced with such unspeakable poverty and hardships that they abandoned their infant by the way-side. Another caravan en-route to the capital and in service with the king, took compassion on the child and picked her up, and by a strange co-incidence of destiny the child was once again united with her parents in the court of Akbar the Great.

Noor Jahan who was originally named "Mehrunnissa" (meaning the sun of womanhood) by her parents lived and was reared in the Zenana (female section) of the Imperial palace. It is presumed that

while still a young lad Jahangir first set eyes on her when she was a little girl playing in the palace gardens. She was exceptionally beautiful and well-mannered. When she grew up, Emperor Akbar married her off to Ali Quli Khan surnamed Sher Afghan (tiger-killer), a brave and promising young man of his times.

When Akbar died and Jahangir became Emperor he bestowed on Ali Quli Khan the jagir of Burdwan in Bengal. But later when he suspected that Ali Quli Khan had been secretly aiding Afghan rebels in Bengal, Jahangir sent his own foster brother Qutb-ud-din Koka, to remove Ali Quli Khan and present him before him for an explanation. During the course of this order a scuffle ensued between the two in which both were killed.

Poor Noor Jahan became a widow and was brought to the Imperial court as an attendant to serve on Salima Begum, the late wife of Akbar. It was sometimes later during the festive season of Nauroze when a Meena-bazaar was held by the women of the palace—a fair which was open only to one male member, His Imperial Highness—the Emperor, that Jahangir saw Noor Jahan once again.

She was standing by her stall dressed in simple white—a colour of mourning. When she saw the Emperor approaching she tried to recede into the shadows but he flung a lantern on her face to see who she was. It was here that he recognised her as Mehrunnisa, the sweet and ravishingly beautiful creature he had met in his childhood.

Jahangir fell head over heels in love with her and proposed to marry her. But Noor Jahan had a daughter from Ali Quli Khan and she mourned his death for a long long time. It was after four years that she finally married him.

It is said that Jahangir loved her so much that he was willing to do anything for her. The first proof of his love that he gave her was the raising of the positions of all her family members. Her father, Mirza Ghias Beg, was given the title of Itimad-ud-daula and her brother Asif Khan was also ennobled; the positions of other male members of her family, were likewise enhanced. Her own name which had changed from Mehrunnisa to Noor Mahal—the light of the palace, now

changed into Noor Jahan---the Light of the world.

The family of Noor Jahan had enjoyed the patronage of even Akbar, to whom they were introduced by Sirdar Malik Masood, the caravan owner, who was their fellow companion on their journey from Persia. Mirza Ghias Beg was an able and experienced man who soon rose to the position of Governor of Kabul and later served as Revenue Minister in the capital at Fatepur Sikri. His two sons Asif Khan and Muhammad Sharif had also gained positions of eminence. Thus Noor Jahan was already the daughter of a dignitary who lived with her mother and family in the palace.

When Noor Jahan was married to Ali Quli Khan her husband was posted to Burdwan—

a border town in Bengal that was in the grip of Afghan chiefs who were always causing trouble. Musa Khan the chief of Sunargaon, Usman Khan of Bakarnagar, Bayazid Qarani of Sylhet, Salim Shah of Arakan, all these chieftains were deadly against the Mughals. Ali Quli Khan, because of his reputation as the Tiger killer, for he had killed a tiger with his hands, was sent to this troublesome part to curb these turbulent chiefs, but it was a thing beyond his control. Even the Governor of Bengal, Raja Man Singh—a braveman, was transferred to Bihar because of his inability to cope with the situation. Jahangir had sent his own foster brother Qutb-ud-din Koka to replace him. He was under the impression that these officers were being negligent on purpose. When Sher Afghan was sent for, he

made some excuse and did not come. You can see for yourself that Noor Jahan was already the wife of a high ranking official who was both brave and independent. When Qutb-ud-din Koka was killed, Noor Jahan and her daughter were in great distress. Some thought of putting an end to her too but instructions arrived in time from the capital that they should be spared. For sometime Noor Jahan was obliged to seek refuge with a Kashmiri family. When Noor Jahan's husband was slain, Jahangir had already left Lahore and was on his way to Kabul. He received the news of Qutb-ud-din's death and sent an order that his wife and daughter be sent to Agra where the rest of her family was.

Noor Jahan's own family at that particular time were engaged in a

serious intrigue. Jahangir's eldest son Khusro was a great favourite of the people. They loved him to the point of adoration, for he was gentlemanly, kept only one wife who was beside him through thick and thin, was gentle of nature and handsome. He had so many supporters that he was led to slip out of the Agra Fort and acquire a large force and funds and make for the Punjab. One of Ghias Beg's sons was with him. His father Jahangir was so mad at him that he pursued him with a ferocity that he had never displayed before and after he had become Emperor. The Governor of Punjab did not welcome Khusro, in fact he helped to achieve his capture.

Noor Jahan was very eager to marry her daughter from her former husband to Prince Khusro but later

when she realized that he was not in the good books of Jahangir and her own brother Asif Khan and her father Ghias Beg, were dreadfully against him, too, she married her to Prince Shehryar. Prince Khurram, another son of Jahangir, was married to Asaf Khan's daughter. In this way all of Noor Jahan's family acquired high connections and the Emperor's love for her made it possible for her to grow in power. This was further abetted by Jahangir's addiction to strong drink. Having observed his wife's intelligence in managing palace affairs, setting the pace for new fashions in clothes and jewellery, passing wise and judicial orders (which she must have learnt to do from her father—the prime-Minister by now), and settling some very important state issues from behind

the veil in her husband's absence, Jahangir decided to give her complete control of the Empire.

Some ten years after her marriage to the Emperor, her father Itimad-ud-daula expired. Jahangir by a royal mandate, authorized Noor Jahan to take complete charge of the state affairs, and thenceforth from the power behind the throne she became the virtual ruler of all the Empire. Her name was joined with that of the Emperor in the new coins now issued.

When Noor Jahan's prestige and position was enhanced to such an extent, Prince Khurram, the heir-apparent after the death of Khusro, grew very jealous and was afraid that Noor Jahan would use her influence with his father to put Shehryar, her own son-in-law (married

to Ladli Begum, her daughter from Sher Afghan, on the throne. Likewise many other Turkish nobles in the court, also grew alarmed by her rising power. One of them was Mahabat Khan—the great General of the Royal troops.

Jahangir towards the latter half of his life remained in a state of very poor health. He suffered from asthma. Once when he had recovered from an attack and was on his way to Kashmir to recoup himself, he heard the news from Kabul that Kandhar had been attacked by the Shah of Iran. Jahangir did not feel it was necessary for him to cancel his trip and instead asked Prince Khurrum (later Shah Jahan) to deal with the situation. Prince Khurram made some excuse to delay the operation and requested instead that he should

be allowed to become the Governor of the whole of Punjab.

The truth was that Prince Khurram was aware that Jahangir was in a state of very bad health and it was not advisable for him to leave the capital and remain too far from his father, for there was no telling what Noor Jahan and her brother might do in his absence. Khurram, instead of fighting against the Shah of Iran, sent him gifts and a letter of congratulations on his ultimate success. He was then the Governor of Gandawana. Taking advantage of his position as such, he collected large funds from the rich land lords of this district as well as from Deccan.

When Jahangir heard of this, he cancelled his trip and returned to Lahore to make different preparations. He wrote to Khurram to refrain from

his evil actions. Khurram could not be careless, he knew that he was too much under the influence of his wife to be of any advantage to him.

Khurram also confiscated Shehryar's jagir near Dhulpur and further angered his father who, in turn, had his lands in Hissar Feroza confiscated and repaid him in like value. Thus began the first show of open hostility between father and son. All through Khurram put the blame on Noor Jahan. Even Asif Khan got against her, for he preferred to support his son-in-law Khurram.

Noor Jahan was well aware of the combined force against her. She too began to resort to stratagem. Mahabat Khan had all along been very hostile towards her and had had the audacity to tell the king in open terms not to allow a woman to rule

him that far. Noor Jahan promoted Mahabat Khan from General to the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Forces and thus won his loyalty. Khurram had received the news that his father was transferring the Royal Treasury from Agra to Lahore. He made plans to intercept his father, seize the treasury as well as the town of Lahore. Noor Jahan advised Jahangir to send Mahabat Khan to deal with Khurram.

But Mahabat Khan as well as the Governor of Bengal who rose up against him were defeated. Jahangir then directed Mahabat Khan to combine his forces with that of Prince Parwez and save the principalities of Bihar and Allahabad from the clutches of Khurram. This time the Prince was taught a severe lesson and was obliged to beg for forgiveness. It was

Noor Jahan who advised Jahangir that the Prince had had enough and should be forgiven.

Asif Khan had been careful enough not to openly support the Prince but now that he had been defeated, he once again turned towards his sister and sought favour with her. He knew that this newly acquired friendship of Mahabat Khan and the Emperor's eldest son Parwez would one day undo the cause of his own son-in-law Shehryar if allowed to grow. He tried to remind Noor Jahan of Mahabat Khan's old hostility against her and also put up a charge of misappropriation of war funds against him. As a result, Noor Jahan was instigated to send Mahabat Khan off to Bengal—the worst possible area, always subject to trouble. But Mahabat Khan had enough cunning to

realize what was happening and he somehow prevailed upon Jahangir to send his other son Prince Khanzad Khan to Bengal while himself he returned to his own province of Ratham bore.

Asif Khan who was the treasurer once again reminded Jahangir of the fact that Mahabat Khan had not rendered full accounts of the money he owed to the state Treasury. Further, he made Abdul Rahim Khane-khanaan put up a complaint that Mahabat Khan, when engaged in the Deccan, had killed his son in cold blooded murder and plundered his house. This charge in the eyes of Jahangir —the just, was most serious and he ordered that Mahabat Khan be brought before him at the point of bayonet, sending a force of 1000 men to bring him. Mahabat Khan set

out from Rathombore, a Rajput stronghold equipped with 4000 Rajput soldiers and 200 Mughals in his army, and presented himself at court. Jahangir refused to give him audience till such time that he rendered accounts. Mahabat Khan was much exasperated, since he had married his daughter to one called Barkhurdar Khan without royal consent and the latter had been imprisoned.

When Mahabat Khan had arrived, the "Imperial House" was preparing to go to Kabul. Mahabat followed them along with his troops. By the time they reached and encamped at the banks of the River Jhelum, an opportunity presented itself and Mahabat Khan decided to take time by the forelock and wreak his vengeance. When the Royal troops had

crossed the river in advance of the Royal carriage and retinue, Mahabat Khan ordered his army to check their advance. Taking just a handful of men with him he approached the king, standing outside his tent with folded hands. But Jahangir did not take much notice of this show of submission, as a result Mahabat Khan took the Emperor under arrest. There was a great confusion in the camps and the word had gone around that the Emperor had been arrested by Mahabat Khan. Noor Jahan was alert enough to elude her capture by managing to cross the river to reach her forces. Here she made plans to release her husband from the clutches of Mahabat Khan. When Jahangir heard of what Noor Jahan was intending to do, he quickly sent word that she should refrain from such an action or

his life would be in great peril. Asif Khan and Noor Jahan, however, did not care. Taking full command of her forces and herself seated on an elephant she led the attack on Mahabat Khan. Mahabat Khan's troops held control over the Jehlum Bridge. The Royal forces made an attempt to wade through the river on their horses and elephants. They were hardly half-way when Mahabat Khan's Rajput forces attacked them from the rear. Asif Khan fled and took refuge at the nearest fort. So did his son. Noor Jahan sent a message to Mahabat Khan that she wished to join her husband. The latter allowed her to do so but made his son Beroze to pursue Asif Khan to the Attock. Asif Khan surrendered and joined the camp of Mahabat Khan. Now all three were at his mercy. Maha-

bat, however, had no intentions of harming the Emperor. Whatever he had done was entirely in self defence. He allowed the Emperor to proceed to Kabul in the usual fashion amidst all his pomp and splendour, with full powers to conduct the Durbar and hold court.

Noor Jahan was fuming with rage; she hated to see her Emperor husband under an upstart like Mahabat Khan. He was no doubt brave and gallant but he was not well-versed in the ways of ruling. Soon a dispute arose between the Royal Troopers and Mahabat Khan's Rajput army, over a trifle like the horses' fodder which threw him in such bad light before his men that soon they joined the camp of the Emperor. Back home in India, Khurram or Shah Jahan was proceeding from Deccan towards

Agra. This gave Noor Jahan the excuse to ask the Governor of the Punjab to prepare fresh forces as the Royal Troopers were tired after the tedious journey from Kabul. On the way back to Lahore, Noor Jahan advised Jahangir to go and inspect his troops. Jahangir did so. Seeing him alone without Mahabat Khan the rival forces now began to feel that the Emperor was free and out of the clutches of Mahabat Khan and soon began to shift their loyalties. Mahabat Khan was forced to flee towards Thatta in Sind, taking Asif Khan as hostage with him. This was a very clever scheme thought of by Noor Jahan; Mahabat Khan's forces had to be split and weakened. These were not travelling with a regular army as they had not apprehended any danger. Her second move of calling for re-

inforcements from the Punjab on the pretext of combating the designs of Khurram, was equally clever. It is clear from all this that however indolent and indifferent Jahangir had grown to state affairs, he had not been unwise in placing so much trust on the ability of the Queen. Soon Mahabat Khan, too, released Asif Khan, knowing full well that he had lost the battle. However this triumph was short-lived as the Emperor's health began to deteriorate. They had gone to Kashmir—their favourite summer resort whose climate was considered most salubrious, but this time it did the Emperor little good, for he had grown so weak that he could neither eat, nor drink and the physicians had advised him that a higher altitude was not good for his health. Once again the Imperial

camp set out on a return journey. Near Rijouri the Emperor got such a severe attack of asthma that he died on the way much to the grief of poor Noor Jahan who had so long been a constant companion to her husband and was much advised by him.

Jahangir's death was the end of all those days of glory when she shone in the eyes of her subjects like the sun. Noor Jahan lived almost for another eighteen years, never ceasing to mourn her consort and forever watering the plant of his memory with fresh tears. How could she forget those days when he insisted on her accompanying him in all his excursions—mostly hunting and shooting, the time when he had entrusted two doves in care but on his return had found one missing.

"How did it fly away?" he had asked her lovingly. She let go the other dove from her hands and said in all innocence : "Like this". Later he had taught her to use the bow and arrow which she wielded with such dexterity that once she had killed a washerman's son who had been standing for long before her balcony and refusing to budge when asked to go away. The wailing mother of the dead boy sought justice from Jahangir—pulling relentlessly at the Bell of Justice Jahangir had placed outside his palace-gates. Any one in need and at wish and at any hour of the day, could pull the cords of this bell and ask to see the Emperor. The bereaved mother made full use of this right and Jahangir was obliged to summon the Queen to court and stand trial like any other

criminal. The case, however, was settled when the complainant compromised with blood-money. According to the Islamic Law an option exists wherein the hurt party may, if it so chooses, be compensated by such a sum. Jahangir was a strange combination of cruelty and tenderness. Like Noor Jahan he loved beauty and works of art. He would go into raptures for hours over a beautiful scene or a water-fall. He could never take his eyes off the dhak or pallas trees or from the wild flowers of Kashmir. He remembered the names of numerous birds and beasts of India that were not to be found in Kashmir. He loved to promote the arts and was himself somewhat of a poet and artist. Part of the decorative designs in the palace of Agra were done by him. He appre-

ciated good poety, music, song and dance and had such a good taste for architecture that he designed Akbar's tomb himself. Above all, he loved and appreciated his Queen or else he would not seek her company in preference to that of all others. He had placed such power in her hands as no king had ever done before. While behind the veil she received petitions and dispensed justice. She heard the beautiful compositions of poets and musicians, often reciting her own in response. Noor Jahan was not only exquisitely beautiful but also talented, cultured and well read. People longed to see Noor Jahan of whom they had heard such a lot. They say once a jeweller of Agra managed to disguise himself and entered the 'Meena-bazaar' which no other male than the Emp-

eror could do. Noor Jahan with her keen sight and observation said to the king : "I feel as though there is a man lurking here." Jahangir laughed it over, for it was impossible for him to imagine that anyone could be so bold as to do that, knowing full well it could mean the end of his life. But since the King and Queen were accustomed to sport among themselves, to take up challenges and bets, he allowed her to prove her point. Noor Jahan had all the gates to the Meena-bazaar shut and had a trench dug outside it. When the ladies were about to leave, she closely inspected the way they conducted themselves in crossing the trench. "A woman would raise her dress only upto her ankles and cross—a man would jump with a long stride exposing his legs," she had said. And indeed to the great surprise of

Jahangir, Noor Jahan was right, there was one such man amidst them who had soon exposed himself in that manner. The punishment for this man was severe. But when he explained that his mother had died at his birth and he had never set eyes on her, he was always curious to know what she looked like. People said that she was just like the Queen Noor Jahan. Ever since he had been planning to have at least one glimpse of the Queen somehow, and this was one way in which he could do it and capture the image of his mother. Noor Jahan was too kind-hearted to punish this man over such an innocent wish; even if this man's pretext was false.

Noor Jahan prided herself over her love for orphans. She was known throughout the Empire for her love

and generosity for the orphan girls, among whom she distributed her private funds. She would educate such girls and marry them off with a rich dowry to wealthy and influential men. She had completely re-oriented the life at palace for the women by introducing new fashions in dresses, clothes and jewellery. She is known to be the first person to invent the "Rose perfume". It is said Noor Jahan's bath-water used to be sprinkled with rose-petals. One day she noticed that these flowers when stale gave out an oily substance. Out of this she concocted a perfume known as "Gulab ka arak." Noor Jahan's ingenuity always delighted the pleasure loving king.

The only thing for which Noor Jahan did not have a natural aptitude was hunting but after a certain inci-

dent she became an expert shot. They say once a tiger had prowled into her tent when encamped at a jungle. Noor Jahan was so afraid that she screamed and crouched in a corner till Jahangir came and killed the tiger in the first shot. Jahangir was so disappointed in Noor Jahan's show of fear that for days he advised her to be more brave and independent enough to handle such situations. The king's wishes were like an order for Noor Jahan. A time came when she had become such an expert shot that when the King himself was assailed by a tiger, it was Noor Jahan who saved his life. A deep bond of devotion and love existed between Noor Jahan and Jahangir so much so that they have joined today the ranks of all proverbial lovers. She was vigilant and concerned about her husband's safety and res-

pect, ever eager to cultivate in herself all those virtues that would adhere her to her husband more and more, despite the fact that she was exceedingly beautiful and cultivated already.

Noor Jahan was a perfect combination of a good wife and Queen. Her personality serves as a mirror of the age reflecting clearly the diverse aspects of life under the Mughals. Jahangir's transfer of power into the hands of his Queen shows the broadmindedness with which the Mughal treated their women-folk. Women were not just prisoners locked up in the four walls of the harem but a species in their own right, free to administer and exercise their will within the proper bounds of decency. Noor Jahan was also a perfect intellectual companion ever ready with smart rejoinders

and witty repartee. Once when Jahangir was looking out for the Eid-moon, he began to recite :

"At last the Eid-moon is around".

Said Noor Jahan :

"And lost keys to the wine-house found". How right she was always in deciphering the minds of others! She well knew what the end of Ramazan or fasting for Jahangir could mean.

At another occasion when the Emperor spotted a comet on the sky, a companion enthused, saying: "Look what a trail of light it sheds".

The Queen having heard the remark answered from behind her veil:—

"Not a star that raises its head on the sky
But a message that at biddance of a king
would fly"

With what grace and talent the

Queen was endowed, to have such ready reprisals for the king! And what temperamental affinity too!

It appears Noor Jahan did entertain male audience from among the noblemen only; she spoke to them through a covered face. Once when she was taking a stroll in the palace garden along with some dignitaries, a poet by the name of Mirza Saidi who had only arrived that morning and encamped on the out-skirts of this garden, at seeing a lady covering her face quickly, and not knowing that this was the Queen, recited.

> "In the garden with what delicacy and
> care she applies the veil
> So as to sieve first that fragrance that her
> nostrils must inhale."

When Noor Jahan heard this exquisite piece of poetry she was beside herself with delight. Sending for the poet she presented him five

hundred rupees and arranged for him to join the assembly of the court poets. Often the court poets would send their latest compositions to the Queen containing riddles that needed to be solved. To the joy of every one Noor Jahan would solve these riddles in equally good verse. She would also attend all symposiums and poetry recitals at court but always remain seated behind a curtain.

Once a famous poet called Talib had presented a eulogy to the Emperor. Noor Jahan said to him: "You write so much in praise of the Emperor but not for me, how is that?" The poet at this request folded his hands in submission before the veiled Queen and replied:—

"One I have not seen
How may I praise!"

Noor Jahan was herself a fairly good poet. Although it is to be assumed that she was quite prolific, not many of her poems survive. The quality of the few that do, is rather good, in fact her extempore verse is better than the Emperor's and more profound or full of wit. The fame of the Queen as a lady of exceptional talents had spread far and wide, especially that incident when a tiger had assailed the king having climbed up to the elephant's back he had reached the howdah where the king was seated. Noor Jahan was on horse-back and at a distance, seeing this happen she spurred her horse and reaching the spot took such an accurate aim at the tiger that in a matter of seconds the beast went tumbling down dead. The king was so pleased and grateful to her that

he came down from his seat at once and bending before her kissed her hands. On going back to the palace that evening Noor Jahan performed the customary "Thanks giving" ceremony—feeding of the poor. In no time she gained the name herself for being a tiger killer or Sher Afghan. Poets rushed to write in honour of her bravery. One said:

"Although in appearance a woman be
Noor Jahan
In the ranks of men she is the woman
Sher Afghan"

In the original Persian "Zan-e-Sher Afghan" has a double meaning, one being the wife of Sher Afghan (which she was formerly). Noor Jahan was also deeply interested in architecture. There is one called "the Inn of Noor Mahal" built at a village in the Jullundur district. It is well-made and beautiful to look at. As

the royal family spent most of its time holidaying at Kashmir, there are many splendid gardens built there but only one such in Lahore. This was built at the behest of Noor Jahan near Shahadra and is famous today as "Jahangir's Tomb". It was formerly called 'Dilkusha'—one that delights the heart. It was her wish that no domes should be erected and it should be of a simple pristine design.

Once when the Emperor watched its progress he sighed and said to the Queen: "Who shall bear the burden of this work"? Perhaps he had a premonition of the fact that he would die before the completion of the work and it seemed that it was his wish to be buried here.

When the king died he was buried in the garden made by his beloved wife. It was her only solace in

the long eighteen years she spent without him. She mourned her dead husband all through the rest of her life, having given up all the fine clothes and niceties of life, she spent her time in seclusion, not caring to interfere in the state affairs and its endless intrigues. She died at the ripe old age of seventy three and was buried close to her husband but in a humbler tenement. It still exists today—a living testimony of her great loneliness, for the epitaph on her grave says.—

"On the tomb of poor me
None a candle or flower bring
Neither a moth flutters here
Nor a bulbul doth sing."

Akbar the Great, the third Mughal King of India, was an exceedingly ambitious man. He was determined to consolidate the Mughal Empire by bringing under his direct control all north-west and central India and even the west, east and south. Many of the provinces had already been under the earlier Muslim Sultans and under other Muslim dynasties. One such kingdom or independent principality had been founded in the Deccan some two hundred years earlier by a military commander called Hasan. It was called the Bahamani Kingdom, Hasan was once an ordinary soldier

who had risen to the rank of a General during the days of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq of Delhi. At the break up of the Central power at Delhi, Hasan, taking advantage of the situation, assumed control of the Deccan. In course of time this kingdom also broke up and was divided into different states one of which was the state of Ahmadnagar. The Sultan of this state was Burhan Khan, he had a daughter called Chand Bibi whom he had given in wedlock to the Sultan of the neighbouring kingdom of Bijapur. She was so brave and intrepid that they say once when her husband, the Sultan was asleep, thieves broke into the royal chambers of the palace and were about to kill him when Chand Bibi awoke and frustrated their evil designs by quickly unsheathing

her sword and putting an end to each one of them. From thence onward Chand Bibi acquired great fame for her heroism. When the Sultan of Bijapur died, he was succeeded by a young nephew. He was yet not of fit age to rule, so Chand Bibi who had been taught statecraft by her own father decided to become his adviser. In fact she ruled on his behalf. As had happened earlier during the times of Razia Sultana, the ministers and noblemen at Court became very jealous and began to resent her authority over them. They rose up in arms against her and attacked Bijapur. Chand Bibi, undaunted and unafraid, marched out at the head of the state army and gave them a crushing defeat. Meanwhile at Ahmadnagar her father, Sultan Burhan Shah, had also died

and left the kingdom in the care of a young son who soon after assuming charge was killed by his noblemen. Chand Bibi rushed from Bijapur and with the help of her troops declared war on the nobles and placed her nephew (in fact her late husband's nephew) Adil Shah on the throne of Ahmadnagar and began to administer the affairs of both the states. Chand Bibi proved herself as fine and able an administrator as she was a warrior. Kind and good to her subjects both to the Hindus and Muslims alike, her subjects became very happy to have such a strong ruler over them. The states of Bijapur and Deccan became very strong. So much so that when Akbar the Great who envisaged a plan to conquer not only the whole of India, but parts of central Asia,

too, this kingdom under Chand Bibi posed the greatest obstacles in his way.

Akbar wanted to prevent the growth of regional powers. He had realized that the earlier invaders, the Turkish and the Afghan Sultans, had made quite a lasting impact on India but Delhi, the capital, had seemed so aloof from indigenous life in order to maintain the imperial dignity that it had lost sight of the rapid growth of these states carved out by different Muslim fortune seekers, Mongols, Afghans, Turks, Persians, Arabs or Abyssinians. Gujarat, Malwa, Jaunpur, Bengal and Northern Deccan, had been left quite free and independent for a long time.

Ahmadnagar was ruled by Nizam Shah. When he became too old and feeble his younger brother Burhan

Shah (Chand Bibi's father) tried to assume control of the state. At this juncture he made the foolish mistake of seeking help from the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great who extended him much help by dispatching a regular force to assist him in his designs, but to no effect. Nizam Shah held his ground till such time that he died his natural death. Burhan Shah succeeded his brother automatically and without the help of the Mughal Emperor. He, therefore, did not feel the necessity of being subservient to Akbar and pay him tribute.

Akbar had already reached Malwa and was waiting for some excuse to annex these territories. The squabbles between these two brothers, and later after their death the fight between Ahmadnagar and

Bijapur under Chand Bibi who was trying desperately to keep her father's and her husband's kingdoms intact in the absence of a grown up ruler, Akbar got the necessary opportunity to attack these states. At first he had tried to make these rulers accept his suzerainty and consent to pay tribute, sending various diplomatic missions but these envoys achieved little success. Burhan Shah and likewise Chand Bibi, his illustrious daughter, were made of a different metal. They would die but never fall. When the imperial Generals Prince Murad and Abdur Rahim Khan-e-Khanaa and Prince Danial reached the gates of the fort of Ahmadnagar, Chand Bibi boldly told them that their informer (her own Chief Minister Munshoo Jamagi who in league with the Mughals had

attempted to set an imposter called Ahmad on the throne and pass him off as the heir to Nizam Shah the uncle of Chand Bibi who had died, had already been dealt with and had fled and they might as well fly away also.

The Imperial representatives offered Chand Bibi two alternatives, either she hand over her possessions to the Mughals or accept their suzerainty and pay tribute. The brave Queen was willing to accept neither of the two unfair conditions, come what may. Considering the might of the Mughal Empire under Akbar the Great, such resistance as put up by a mere woman is unparalleled in Indian History. It could only take a person of immense grit and courage to defy such a mighty Emperor as Akbar who had already

given ample proof of his successful exploits. He had already secured the important strategical position at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamna by building there the fort of Allahabad, later he had won Kashmir and annexed it to his dominions on the same pretext that its Sultan had dared to resist his power and refused to accept his suzerainty. Southern Sind, Orissa, Baluchistan and Kandhar, had already surrendered and even Kabul and Ghazni had acknowledged his overlordship. No one during that period could dare to challenge Akbar (except the tribal areas of the North-West Frontier who had killed one of his ambassadors Birbal). Chand Bibi's defiance and determination to defend the fort of Ahmadnagar at all cost was heroic beyond norm.

When surrounded by the imperial forces Chand Bibi finding that war with the Mughals was inevitable, soon began to prepare a large army. She filled the fort with ample food-provisions to off-set danger to her forces from starvation. She called upon her subjects, especially the land-owners to help with all their lives and possessions in defending the city of Ahmadnagar. All rallied by her side knowing full well that if they allowed this city to fall, the others would fall too like nine-pins one after another.

Akbar had one good excuse to take Ahmadnagar. He made it seem that it needed to be protected against Bijapur and its King Adil Shah—the nephew of her husband in whose place she had long officiated as ruler earlier. But Chand Bibi made friends

with her nephew and also with Malik Qutb Shah, another powerful ruler of one of the Deccan states, who now became her active supporter. She tried to show the Mughal Emperor that the Deccan was in no need of help and would brook no interference in her internal affairs from any other quarter. All rulers of the Deccan states allied with Chand Bibi and avowed their support to her against the Mughals. Akbar became seriously concerned and spent many an anxious moment. The situation became more grave when a negro chieftain by the name of 'Nahang' actually brought forward his forces for the help of Chand Bibi. He had come in response to the impassioned pleas made by this brave and heroic lady to all the people of Deccan that the hour of trial had arrived, that if they

wished to defend their lives and honour and, above all, their sacred land, they would all have to rise as one man to face the common danger.

This Abyssinian Chieftain was so brave that when he saw the Mughal forces surrounding the fort of Ahmad nagar, he broke through their ranks to enter the fort.

Hitherto the imperial forces had taken Chand Bibi lightly. They thought being just a mere woman—a weaker sex, she could easily be domineered into submission either by force or cajolery. But Chand Bibi was determined to prove that she was as good as any male force to be reckoned with. Every time the Mughal army dug its trenches around the fort, Chand Bibi would appear on the spot and foil their efforts. When

they bore a deep hole through the walls of the fort she stood personally to supervise its reconstruction and repair. She placed cannons outside the fort and had no qualms about using them. Even the ordinary peasant in the fields helped to put obstacles in the way of the Mughal army and send a minute to minute report to Chand Bibi regarding every move of the enemy. Peasant forces would plunder the Mughal caravans on the highway bringing food provisions for its army.

The Khan-e-Khanaa engaged in this operation against Chand Bibi, wanted to blow up the interior of the fort with gun powder. To achieve this objective it was necessary to first bore holes into the fort or to make tunnels to reach it. It took them three months to make some

three to five of such tunnels, but Chand Bibi would strike like lightning and frustrate all their efforts. At last they made a tunnel of which Chand Bibi's forces were not aware and prepared to set fire to the gun powder placed inside. The front flanks of the fort fell apart with this explosion, the imperial troops waited for other mines to blow up but it seemed their existence had been forestalled and off-set. The breach created by this act was too narrow and too firmly barred by Chand Bibi's soldiers to allow the enemy to force their way in. Some say Chand Bibi was present on the spot when this happened. At the sound of the explosion her men had made a move to run away but dressed in military attire with a steel helmet on her

head and a veil on her face, she stood firmly rooted to the ground and unsheathing her sword threatened to kill any soldier who would attempt to run away. Her guardsmen were ashamed to flee when a woman had held so firm. It is thus due to her own personal courage and discipline that the Mughals had been kept at bay for such a long time. They say Chand Bibi had already arranged to equip the citizens of Ahmadnagar with sand and mud sacks necessary to rebuild the fallen rampart. In a matter of no time maunds of sand and mud appeared over which Chand Bibi installed her cannons and began to open fire on the enemy. The imperial forces marvelled at the loyalty of her subjects and their great love for her. Brave and able

Generals took orders from her and obeyed her commands.

Whatever Chand Bibi had done so far, it was at her own expense. Seeing the superior force of Akbar large in number and having so far won many wars, the rulers of the different Deccan States other than Bijapur and Ahmadabad turned back on their words and did not arrive on the scene when Ahmadnagar was attacked. Chand Bibi with the help of her army and subjects held out alone. She fought single-handed with great ferocity as long as she could.

Food provisions ran out and so did ammunition. When there was a dearth of lead and iron, Chand Bibi ordered that silver be used. But by this time even the Mughal forces

could not hold out longer. Chand Bibi was expecting reinforcements from her negro ally which were soon to arrive. The Mughals had caused such devastation around that there was not a blade of grass left nor any fodder for their horses. Their food supply would be cut off, for their convoys had to pass through various hostile territories of the Deccan. At last they made an attempt to sue for peace.

Chand Bibi sensing the exhaustion of both men and material was ready enough to agree to it. At least the siege would be lifted and her people get a breather. But she was willing for peace only on her own terms, the imperial forces would have to vacate Ahmadnagar altogether and she would in return cede to them certain territory.

The Mughul forces were compelled to come to terms with Chand Bibi for a while. They needed to reinforce themselves. At the same time since she was expecting a reprisal in any case and knew very well that this truce was temporary—the Mughals would never brook defeat at the hands of a woman, she kept herself in a state of preparedness. The Khan-e-Khanaa and Prince Murad instead of returning to Delhi halted at a village in the vicinity of Bihar (one of the five Deccan states). They were afraid that this victory might give an air of primacy to Chand Bibi in the eyes of all the Deccan rulers and at any moment she may muster their combined forces at her command to fight the Mughals. To be on the safe side they made an alliance with Raja Ali

Khan of Burhanpur, and Prince Murad went so far as marrying his daughter and thus assuring his full support. This alliance gained him some 3000 more soldiers, to this he hoped to add the forces of a petty chieftain called Shahbaz Khan who suggested that Ahmadnagar should be plundered and looted. But Prince Murad differed with him as he did not want to permanently alienate the people of the Deccan and make their future conquest impossible for the Mughals.

Shahbaz Khan left Prince Murad in a huff. They also were informed by this time that Chand Bibi had strengthened her hands with the help of Suhail, the negro chieftain, as well as by the forces of Bijapur who, all told, amounted to some 60,000 men, and intended to attack

the Mughal forces. The latter were much disconcerted and indeed what they had heard was true. Chand Bibi had already set out of Ahmadnagar for an offensive, leading her army like a warrior king. It became clear that Chand Bibi's former victory had made quite an impact on her subjects, and other Deccan rulers. If they had failed to reach her in time then or were afraid to do so due to Mughal strength, they certainly had combined with her now. The Mughal forces under Prince Murad and the Khan-e-Khanaa were banking on creating a split between the Deccan rulers and render Chand Bibi helpless, for how long could she carry on single-handed. But their schemes had failed. Chand Bibi's initial victory against the Mughals had not only put them to shame for not having

participated in that war as they had assured her, but also because Chand Bibi, by her heroic action, had proved it that the Mughals were after all not all that invulnerable and if they only tried they could beat them off from their territory. Now as compared to the enemy's 20,000 men, her ranks had swelled to three times more. The Mughals had been relaying the false news that they were winning whereas in fact they had made very little advance—the fort of Ahmadnagar was still intact and the little damage they had inflicted on it, had soon been put right. So the Mughals decided upon a better strategy to first attack the arsenal from which the Deccanis derived their main source of strength against the Mughals who had to travel many a hundred mile away from their headquarters. When

they succeeded in blowing up the ammunition dump, great panic was created and Chand Bibi's forces soon began to flee. It is at this particular moment of riot and confusion that Chand Bibi's composure and ability came to the fore. So far only the force stationed at the arsenal had been put to rout, if the main force was to advance and see this, it may also panic and flee. So immediately she ordered a retreat and draw the enemy forces to the unknown hinterland from which she struck out afresh with all her might. The enemy was well-duped into a snare and surrounded by the rival forces. Stiff fighting ensued till late that night.

The ruler of Burhanpur Raja Ali Khan was killed and his forces had withdrawn. Both sides lost heavily but the Mughal forces had suffered

a definite defeat at the hands of the warrior Queen Chand Bibi, for they, too, began to flee now.

The Khan-e-Khanaa who took his place at the arsenal witnessed the horrible spectacle of the fast fleeing Mughal forces. The sun had set and through the dusk he could see the enemy carrying away their forsaken arms and ammunition loaded on camels, asses and mules.

At this juncture a false rumour began to spread that the Khan-e-Khanaa had been killed, whereupon the remnants of the Mughal fighting force also lost heart and began to run.

Chand Bibi's army indulged itself in plundering and looting and in particular in seeking the Royal Treasures. It was said that gold

coins were always wrapped up in red or green cloth. The forces of Suhail the negro chieftain, eager to capture the Mughal camels to carry their rich booty home, forsook their chieftain and left him standing alone in the battle field. On the other side, past a stream stood the Khane-e-Khanaa equally abandoned. By night-fall when he was just about to take cover under the military vehicles and go to sleep hoping to take fresh measures the next day, he suddenly beheld a strange sight.

Just a few yards away from him loomed a camp-fire from the light of which he could see some of Suhail's soldiers preparing to eat. It was not known to them that the Khan-e-Khanaa was on the opposite side and still alive. Taking advantage of the situation in the thick cover

of night, Khan-e-Khanaa called for help and opened cannon fire at the men in his direct range. Suhail's men were blown to pieces and Chand Bibi's forces, taken unaware were quite baffled, they could not tell what was happening. Perhaps the Mughals had mustered fresh strength and attacked. Soon the Mughals began to blow the trumpets of victory and rallied all their forces. They began to emerge from every nook and corner, from every hill-top and tree where they had fled for shelter and the Deccanis began to take flight. The cunning Khan-e-Khanaa they say blew the trumpet of victory at least eleven times that night, giving the impression that they had gained over Chand Bibi's forces.

But Suhail soon recovered having guessed as to what had happened.

He had all fire put out and the torch-lights, too, and steering his remaining men out of range, he ordered them to make the clarion call and muster strength. Soon some twelve thousand strong rallied by his side. Chand Bibi's force was still more in number. The Khan-e-Khanaa did not have more than some four thousand soldiers. Neither of the two parties could gauge and assess their respective strength. The Mughals had responded to the call of victory and Chand Bibi's men to the signal of fresh danger.

The Khan-e-Khanaa, a clever man, made sure that he fought the enemy before sunrise, before his soldiers could realize the strength of Chand Bibi's forces and lose heart. They had been given to understand that the Mughal forces had already

achieved victory and only Chand Bibi's few remaining men had to be crushed. Hence sure of themselves, they fought with such vigour that Chand Bibi's superior force was actually crushed and her triumph turned to defeat by sheer stroke of ill-luck.

The Khan-e-Khanaa by now began to think that he had shown a great performance and had proved himself superior to Prince Murad, as a result they fell out with each other. The report of this rift caused the Emperor great anxiety and he recalled both of them to the capital, sending in their place Syed Yusuf Khan Mashedi and Abul Fazal. Neither of these two matched the military skill of Khan-e-Khanaa. Meanwhile Prince Murad died of intemperance at Agra and considering the place unlucky, Akbar

later shifted to Fatehpur Sikri, the city of a well-known Saint Sheikh Salim Chishti who had predicted that only three of the Emperor's sons would survive. After the conquest of Gujarat it was re-named Fatehpur or Fatehabad (Victory town). Here he took residence for fifteen years. With the death of Prince Murad who was in possession of the conquered territories, Chand Bibi was emboldened to win back lost ground and despite the best efforts of the new Generals Yusuf Mashedi and Abul Fazal, she would not relinquish her hold. As a result Akbar was obliged to recall these two and dispatch instead his other son Prince Danial and the old Khan-e-Khanaa. Abul Fazal reported to Akbar that the Deccan could not possibly be conquered unless the Emperor himself led a force

and waged war on the Deccanis personally. It is as a sequel to this report that Akbar marched on the Deccan with a force of eighty-thousand strong.

Raja Ali Khan of Burhanpura, father-in-law of Murad, had been killed and was succeeded by his son Bahadur-dil or Bahadur Khan. Akbar had believed that this new ruler would also side with the Mughals in their campaigns but Chand Bibi's rising popularity and the fame of her astonishing courage and leadership had altered the situation. He refused to side with the Mughals like his father.

Akbar first wanted to teach this haughty new ruler a lesson. Once he could make Burhanpur to fall, it was easy for the other states to yield, but not to deal with Ahmadnagar

first was to allow Chand Bibi enough time to equip herself and there was no telling that she would not rush to the help of Bahadur Khan. Akbar was in quite a fix as to how to proceed. At last he decided to deal with Burhanpur himself and let the Khan-e-Khanaa attack Ahmadnagar.

Once again began the same old procedure. The Khan-e-Khanaa's soldiers began to dig trenches outside the fort of Ahmadnagar, catapult the walls, dig tunnels and bore holes into the walls within which Chand Bibi was locked secure. Her other Deccani allies met the Royal troopers on the main highway.

The siege of the Burhanpur Fort proved more difficult for Akbar than he was willing to admit. However he had definitely succeeded in starving out the enemy. Their food pro-

vision was ruined and when even then they had not succeeded in making the enemy surrender, Akbar resorted to the same vile trick of Khan-e-Khanaa, namely, spreading the rumour in Burhanpur that Ahmadnagar had fallen and Chand Bibi had come to terms. The duped King of Burhanpur surrendered himself and handed over the fort to Akbar.

Chand Bibi, although prepared to fight the Mughal forces with the same undaunted courage and daring as before, unfortunately met with very bad luck as dissension broke out among her noblemen who once again raised the question of her right to rule over Ahmadnagar and her nephew's right over Bijapur. The negro chieftain who had hitherto championed her cause now began to grow jealous of

her rising power and superiority. By the time Akbar arrived with his force, the fort of Ahmadnagar had already been besieged by Suhail—the Abyssinian who was demanding its possession from Chand Bibi. There was no hope of winning against the Mughals now, for she had too many enemies and few friends. The Mughal troops stormed the citadel and ever since nothing more has been heard of Chand Bibi than this that war with the Deccan came to an end with the death of the valiant Queen who resisted the Mughals to the last. There are many different versions in history as to the manner of death she met with. Some say that she was so brave that she never took precautions for her life and was killed in sleep by one of her own noblemen. Others think she was assassinated

by one of Akbar's men before the attack and there are still others who say, when left helpless she took her own life. One thing, however, is clear beyond doubt that she resisted the Great Mughal to the end and Ahmadnagar fell but only over her dead body in 1600-A.D.

No woman in recorded history of the Indo-Pak continent so distinguished herself for bravery as to have become a legend like Chand Bibi.

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